

## Education

# A Watery Road to Success



Through the programs at Rocking the Boat, kids learn teamwork and see tangible results as they build a boat from scratch and then launch it into the Hudson.

By Filomena Gomes

**K**ids taking to the water in boats — on the Bronx River? A boat-building program for high schoolers is not only teaching the students how to row, they're going out in boats they've built themselves. The objective of Rocking the Boat, Inc., is to empower kids by assigning them work with tangible goals while teaching them about teamwork and academic and social skills.

"It's to get kids turned on to the resources both around them and inside them. To know that they can do the things that they want to with their lives, and have more choices and more power to access those choices than they might have known before," says Adam Green, the organization's founder and its executive director. Green got hooked on water ed. while doing a volunteer project in college; as a child he spent a lot of time with his parents, sailing the Hudson on the environmental sloop, the *Clearwater*. He is now vice-president on the *Clearwater's* board of directors.

The free high school program he now runs has after school and summer courses, and offers both boat building and on-water education

(which includes environmental science and maritime skills). They serve 400 kids annually.

The first step is a trip to the Hudson Valley to harvest wood. Once the kids select and cut the wood, they apply math, carpentry, and organizational skills to build 14- to 17-foot long Whitehall rowing boats in the shop. The final step is the launching ceremony in the Bronx River.

Rocking the Boat also offers an *On-Water Program*, which teaches students the skills to monitor and be caretakers of the river. Using boats built by their peers, the On-Water students work with area scientists to collect data and water samples, conduct research, monitor habitats, and study restoration.

Requiring less physical work, schools and other organizations can participate in the program's Community Environmental Education program, where the river is the classroom.

"We do basic programming where we just take kids out on the river and go through environmental monitoring protocols with them," explains Green. "We're doing a program in the spring with an architecturally-focused high school — Pablo Neruda

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H.S. — and we're doing a specific project on architectural development along the Bronx River and parks creation and landscape design. We have all the resources of the river and what's around it to make use of."

Aside from boat building, Rocking the Boat offers students a place to be themselves and to learn about self sufficiency. The program does not, however, intend to be a replacement for school. Program staff collect report cards and keep in touch with each participating student's teachers to make sure kids are keeping up with their studies.

"In no way does Rocking the Boat want to be a deterrent or distraction from school, so it's really important that kids maintain their grades while being in the program," emphasizes Green. "If they don't do well in school — unlike the normal response to kick them off the program, we use the program as leverage. We encourage and mandate them to take part in

tutoring programs, for example."

To apply to the program, high school kids must complete an application and come in for an interview with their parents.

"Parents are welcome to stop by the shop or the water any time. Parents are sort of the royalty that we always roll out the carpets for. That's what is going to make really strong change, getting parents involved and giving kids a reason for wanting to be around their parents."

Green says that interested parents should contact him directly. "I'd love to talk to them. By far and away, the most successful kids have come through parents who are independently interested and pushing their kids to get involved."

Detailed information on the program and the application process can be found on the Rocking the Boat website: [www.rockingtheboat.org](http://www.rockingtheboat.org). You can also call (718) 466-5799, or email: [adam@rockingtheboat.org](mailto:adam@rockingtheboat.org). ♦